

Improving Educational Outcomes: How State Policy Can Support School Principals as Instructional Leaders

Executive Summary

Research confirms that effective principals are the key to building a culture of great teaching and learning in schools. Every aspect of learning is influenced by the quality of the school's leaders, from the strength of the teachers to the health of the school environment. School principals serve as both the managers of staff and the builders of school community. As states are pursuing various education reforms necessary to support the implementation of more rigorous standards that will more accurately measure students readiness for college or career training, governors and other state leaders have many opportunities to make policy decisions that will support principals so that they can improve the quality of teaching and learning in every school across a state.

In the past, school principals have focused heavily on aspects of schooling that deal with maintaining operations and managing discipline issues. Recent reform efforts, including increased attention to measuring and acting on data about teacher effectiveness, have shifted the role of the principal into a leader of teaching and learning. Whereas many principals have been trained to manage such things as master schedules and contracts, they are now called upon to better understand the content of instruction and the methods of teaching necessary to support student learning. That new role is characterized as instructional leadership—leading teachers and other instructional staff toward the skills necessary to ensure that students are learning.¹ Effective instructional leaders must possess three critical skills: a knowledge of student learning standards, an ability to identify effective instructional techniques to meet those

standards, and the ability to coach teachers toward enhancing their instructional techniques.

The foundation of instructional leadership is a thorough awareness of student learning standards. Although there have been previous efforts to raise educational standards, the Common Core State Standards and other state initiatives to put in place more rigorous standards require more significant changes in how students are taught if they are to clear the higher bar. Those standards require changes to the way teachers are teaching, which means that instructional leaders must also be prepared to help teachers transition from old to new ways of teaching. Because the standards are so new, principals must expand their roles as instructional leaders who track the efficacy of teaching methods and help teachers continuously improve. Many governors have invested heavily in supporting teacher quality—efforts that, in many states, are leading to better systems to support those directly instructing students. However, a key element of teaching support and improvement has not yet received sufficient attention: by improving the quality of school principals, governors can focus efforts on a smaller number of individuals who can dramatically improve teacher quality, and thereby student learning, especially in the lowest performing schools.

To raise educational attainment, current school principals will have to modify their own habits and lead changes in teachers' instructional practice. To advance those efforts, policymakers can adopt near-term strategies focused on improving professional development and performance evaluation for school principals. For example, states can mandate and fund

¹ DK. Cotton, *Principals and Student Achievement: What the Research Says* (Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2003).

professional development that is aligned to principals' needs, as identified through the evaluation of their performance. To enhance performance evaluation systems, states can provide guidance and resources for designing and implementing systems that reflect the changes that the adoption of new standards requires. Those systems should offer principals consistent, targeted, and high-quality training on how to conduct effective evaluations of teachers that lead to improvements in instruction focused on better preparing students for college or a career-training program.

Concurrently, as new principals are hired, many states are looking to ensure that the skills needed to educate all students to meet higher standards are incorporated into principal pre-service training programs. As a long-term approach, educational systems must move beyond the "re-engineering" of existing principals and focus on preparing and certifying the next generation of principals. For example, policymakers can work to raise admissions standards and monitor preparation programs by holding programs and higher education institutions accountable for educating and supporting new and incoming candidates to be effective school leaders. Similarly, certification and recertification examinations should measure candidates' awareness of new and more rigorous standards and their ability to lead teachers and students in meeting those standards.

Several states have implemented the short- and long-term policy options referenced above, which has yielded a diverse landscape in terms of funding strategies. Many states' have employed the unique opportunity presented by Race to the Top to expand principal supports. However, states have also employed strategic reprogramming of existing state funds or modest additional spending to achieve the same outcomes—suggesting that even small additions to school leadership expenditures can have a significant impact on outcomes for students.

Finally, governors and other state policymakers can ensure that states and school districts provide

indirect support to principals. Such support could include allocating resources for ongoing, high-quality coaching for existing leaders; providing exemplar curriculum resources to help with the transition to higher standards; and ensuring that effective teachers have opportunities to share leadership responsibilities with principals. Governors can also support success by identifying and tracking key measures of educational performance and making strategic changes when those measurements indicate lagging performance.

Introduction

States have pursued a variety of reforms in an effort to raise educational attainment and better prepare more students to be successful in college or career-training programs after high school. Over the last decade, states have raised student learning standards, modified systems that evaluate teachers and principals, and changed the ways in which they collect and use data, among other reforms. A key to the success of current reform efforts will be drawing on what is known about effective teaching and leadership and applying that information to the task of improving the performance of teachers and principals. In previous attempts to improve student learning by improving the standards to which they are held, educator training was adequate to accomplish the work of reading and interpreting standards. The new standards being set by most states will require more. Those standards raise the rigor not only of the content but also of specific learning skills students should be mastering. Success will require that teachers and principals be better trained in preparation programs and receive intensive, ongoing support through regular appraisal of teaching and coaching. In the near term, principals must be prepared to lead their teaching staff through a transition in which the best ways of teaching to the new standards have not yet been identified. In the long term, principals must be trained in preparation programs to learn the standards, identify best teaching practices in relation to the expectations that the standards established, and effectively coach teachers toward continuous improvement so that teaching and learning improve across entire schools.

Standards for student learning serve as the target of all educational practice. Therefore, the instructional practices of teachers and the leadership practices of principals should be aligned with student learning standards. Most states are currently working to implement the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) or similar more rigorous standards that better measure students' readiness for college or career training. Those rigorous state academic standards cover English language arts and literacy, as well as mathematics from kindergarten to 12th grade (K–12). The higher standards clearly define what students need to know and be able to do at each grade level and upon graduation from high school to be ready for success in college or in a career-training program. Although there have been previous efforts to change standards, the newer standards require more intensive changes in teaching in terms of rigor and sequencing of what is taught. If the standards are not implemented well, far too many students will continue to graduate lacking the rigorous education necessary to prepare them for college or a career-training program.

To raise educational attainment statewide, governors can empower principals to lead the effort to implement new standards for student learning. A decade of research supports principals' critical role in shaping the quality of teaching and learning. On average, a principal accounts for 25 percent of a school's total contribution to student achievement. A 2012 study found that principals have a stronger effect on all students in a school than teachers. Teachers primarily affect the students they teach, but principals who improve the effectiveness of the teachers they lead can affect all of the students in their schools.² Furthermore, research has found no evidence of low-performing schools turning performance around without effective leadership.³ Effective school leaders can play a

substantial role in improving student achievement through their day-to-day efforts toward managing teaching and learning.

Indeed, the success of efforts to raise educational attainment school-wide hinges on school principals. Principals who are well prepared and empowered by their districts to lead can, through their roles as instructional leaders and human capital managers, ensure that all the teachers and students in their schools benefit from new educational standards. In that way, principals can be viewed as multipliers of good practice—when principals are effective in leading implementation, they influence every person in the school. Governors and other state policymakers can achieve deeper, wide-scale improvement in the effectiveness of teachers by investing in the knowledge and skills of principals.

Principals Are Critical to School Success

State and federal policies have long focused primarily on teachers and, to a large extent, neglected programs and spending intended to improve the effectiveness of principals. Yet principals either control or influence many of the systems that affect teaching. Most principals were once teachers who learned about the principalship through experiences with their own principals and received only limited, and typically weak, additional training. By failing to adequately attend to the quality of principals, states have missed an opportunity to pull one of the most powerful and far-reaching levers for improved instruction: school leadership. That missed opportunity has become part of a landscape in which principals leave their roles with high frequency and effective teachers report poor working conditions resulting from unprepared or unstable leadership.⁴ Governors can help change

²G. Branch, E. Hanushek, and S. Rivkin, *Estimating Principal Effectiveness*. CALDER Working Paper 32 (Washington, DC: The Urban Institute, 2009).

³Kenneth Leithwood et al., *How Leadership Influences Student Learning* (New York: The Wallace Foundation, 2004), <http://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/school-leadership/keyresearch/Documents/How-Leadership-Influences-Student-Learning.pdf> (accessed April 14, 2015).

⁴TNTP, *The Irreplaceables: Understanding the Real Retention Crisis in American's Schools* (New York: TNTP, 2012).

that landscape by investing in principals as the leaders of teachers and by focusing investments on the components of instructional leadership that directly influence teaching, including knowledge of student learning standards, awareness of high-quality teaching strategies, and the ability to help teachers improve their teaching as they progress through their careers.

In 2014, School Leaders Network, a national nonprofit founded by principals to support principal development and training, published a report highlighting the average cost of training principals coupled with the frequency of principal turnover. The cost of training new principals before they enter the field ranges widely, from nearly \$37,000 to \$303,000, with an average of \$75,000. On average, half of principals stay in their roles only three years—by contrast, the average reform requires five years to work.⁵ Even at the low end of the range, states are continuously spending substantial resources on principals who are not improving outcomes for students because they are expensive to train and leave before they can realize an effect on students. When principals enter situations for which they are poorly trained and receive little support, they are more apt to leave soon after starting. Even a 10 percent reduction in principal turnover in high poverty schools coupled with improvements in principal effectiveness has the potential to increase a single child's future earnings by approximately \$30,000.⁶ Furthermore, if states improved the quality of their investments in school leaders, they could not only save on the exorbitant costs of turnover but also improve the effectiveness of more teachers by diverting some resources currently directed to large numbers of teachers to much smaller numbers of principals. For example, a state that has 75,000 teachers and 2,000 principals (a typical ratio) could allocate \$1 million in training at \$13.33 per teacher or \$500 per principal. The potential benefits of investing

more deeply in fewer individuals include reduced turnover in leadership and improved effectiveness of school leaders, which in turn will improve the working conditions for teachers. Slightly shifting the balance of funding for training from teachers to principals could lead to improvements in quality of instruction and student outcomes.

Principals are the lynchpin for high-quality implementation of education reforms. Perhaps the most pressing reform underway is the transition from student learning standards that do not measure the preparedness of students for college or career training to standards that do. States have adopted new, higher standards designed to drive educational reform that will improve K–12 education and the students' prospects for success in postsecondary education. Those new standards require significant change in the way teachers teach and thus in the way principals coach and develop teachers. Of all the changes needed to raise educational standards, providing support to educators to make the appropriate changes and increase the rigor of instruction, is perhaps the most important. For example, to help students meet the challenge of higher standards, teachers are expected to elevate their role as facilitators of learning and increase the use of instructional activities that focus on enhancing their students' critical thinking skills while reducing the amount of material they require their students to learn by rote. Also, teachers from different grade levels are expected to collaborate with one another so that classes are aligned from year to year to promote continued learning. Those efforts must be fully integrated into the instructional practices of each school as changes in teachers' daily routines—not as a short-lived reform. That requires leadership and action from each principal who must coach teachers, provide them with collaborative planning time, monitor progress, and deliver ongoing support.

Strong instructional leadership ensures that principals

⁵School Leaders Network, *Churn: The High Cost of Principal Turnover* (New York: School Leaders Network, 2014).

⁶Ibid.

remain focused on providing every student in their schools access to great teaching and learning. In addition to supporting the direct work of instructional leadership, states can support principals in their roles as managers of human capital and heads of school operations. Each of those roles has implications for the school system's ability to achieve better educational outcomes. Generally, effective principals give priority to the following responsibilities:

- Developing and sustaining a vision of academic success based on high standards for the school, the teachers, and all students;
- Creating a safe and cooperative learning environment for students and staff;
- Cultivating leadership in others so that everyone contributes to the achievement of the school vision and delivers effective instruction;
- Supporting teachers with useful evaluation, appropriate training and ongoing development, and sufficient collaboration time; and
- Managing people, data, and resources.⁷

When school principals develop strong practices in each of those areas, they are better able to create environments in which teachers can thrive and their students succeed.

Short- and Long-Term State Strategies to Support Principals' Leadership

States that are seeking to improve educational outcomes should be thinking about and taking action on improving every aspect of a principal's career trajectory, including pre-service preparation, certification processes, evaluation and support, and professional development. That continuum of

support is often referred to as a principal performance management system. Many states are currently working to implement new student learning standards, but those efforts often progress separately from efforts to improve performance management systems, which raises the question of how well the policies and implementation plans are aligned and support each other. For example, failure to align revised principal evaluation systems with new student standards misses an opportunity for principal supervisors to consistently gauge whether principals are able to determine whether teachers understand and exhibit the critical skills and concepts needed to teach to state standards for student learning. To achieve the greatest benefit from reform efforts, such as implementing new student standards, governors need to provide leadership, support, and funding to ensure that the strategies presented in this section are implemented, consistently across the state, and in an aligned way.

In the short term, states can support principals through policies and practices that affect currently practicing school leaders. For example, governors and other policymakers can focus their efforts on providing effective professional development tailored to principals as well as implementing teacher and principal evaluation systems that reflect changes that the state's educational standards require. As with all reforms, implementation is not a bounded process but rather an ongoing effort that requires continuous monitoring and improvement. In the long term, policymakers should take steps to prepare and certify principals for the knowledge and skills to help all students meet more rigorous and relevant standards as they enter the workforce. Finally, throughout the transition to new standards, governors and other state policymakers can bolster efforts focused on essential

⁷The Wallace Foundation, *The School Principal as Leader: Guiding Schools to Better Teaching and Learning* (New York: The Wallace Foundation, 2013), <http://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/school-leadership/effective-principal-leadership/Documents/The-School-Principal-as-Leader-Guiding-Schools-to-Better-Teaching-and-Learning-2nd-Ed.pdf> (accessed April 14, 2015); and National Association of Elementary School Principals, *Recruiting, Preparing and Building the Capacity of Effective Principals: Eight Evidence-based Recommendations for Federal Policymaking* (Alexandria, VA: National Association of Elementary School Principals, 2013), http://www.naesp.org/sites/default/files/NAESP_8_POLICY%20BRIEF%20022113.pdf (accessed April 14, 2015).

Shared Vision: A Key Policy Driver

Most states that are advancing state-level policies to support principals—particularly with the implementation of more rigorous standard that will more accurately measure students readiness for college or career training—describe a shared vision that guides their work. The shared vision lays out the broad goals the state is attempting to meet and aligns all work toward those goals. By collaborating with state and district stakeholders to define a vision, states are better positioned to integrate disparate interests and reforms into a cohesive plan. That plan enables policymakers to coordinate funding streams and recognizes that it is easier to leverage allocations when it is clear where money is going. In addition, a coherent framework for performance management can link the vision, strategies, resources, and stakeholders to support the work and ensure that everyone is moving in the same direction. In thinking through all of the policy changes necessary to implement high-quality standards, states should make that step a priority and ensure that all stakeholders are on board. For example, a 2012 report by the Kentucky Department of Education lays out a comprehensive vision, theory of action, and set of strategies for developing and sustaining a network of next-generation professionals for the state’s schools and classrooms.⁸ That report weaves together all of the current educator effectiveness efforts in the state, including the state’s 2009 landmark education reform legislation.⁹ Furthermore, in 2013, the Kentucky Board of Education passed regulations focused on educator professional learning.

indirect support for principals, such as assistance with curriculum development and materials acquisition and providing incentives and support for leadership opportunities.

Short-Term Strategy 1: Improve Principal Professional Development Systems

To assist current principals in changing their practices to raise educational performance, states should review their approach to principals’ professional development. Professional development should be targeted to principals’ needs, aligned with other reform efforts, systematic, and reflective of the kind of instruction that is being asked of teachers. Ongoing development

is the primary tool by which the country’s nearly 100,000 current principals will learn about the shifts that new education reforms require, particularly in the short term.¹⁰ For example, teachers and principals alike need to learn how new standards are different from previous state standards with regard to content and rigor. To be effective, training and development must at least be high quality, aligned with the specific needs of each individual, connected to school and district goals, and continual.

State policies have traditionally left training and ongoing development decisions to school districts, providers, and principals, but that strategy often

⁸ Kentucky Department of Education, *Next Generation Professionals Delivery Plan*, (November 2012), <http://education.ky.gov/commofed/cdu/documents/nxgen%20professionals%20delivery%20plan.pdf> (accessed April 29, 2015).

⁹ An Act Relating to Student Assessment, Senate Bill 1 (2009), Kentucky Legislature, <http://www.lrc.ky.gov/record/09rs/SB1.htm> (accessed May 4, 2015).

¹⁰ Amy Bitterman, Rebecca Goldring, Lucinda Gray, and Stephen Broughman, *Characteristics of Public and Private Elementary and Secondary School Principals in the United States: Results from the 2011–12 Schools and Staffing Survey*, (Washington, DC: Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education, 2013), <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2013/2013313.pdf> (accessed April 14, 2015).

falls short.¹¹ Historically, professional development provided to teachers and principals has been both expensive and ineffective. To adequately position ongoing professional development as a key short-term strategy to support principals in the immediate implementation of new education reforms, governors and other state policymakers can support a variety of policies and strategies, including:

- Mandating and providing focused, and effective training and skill-building opportunities, particularly those proven to affect teacher and student outcomes and that are aligned with instructional techniques consistent with the state’s standards;
- Requiring schools and districts to provide training and skill-building opportunities that are tied to principals’ evaluation results. States are working to improve principal evaluation systems and better align them with the skills and techniques required to implement state standards.¹² States can get the greatest benefit from those systems by putting structures and guidance in place that tie together principal evaluation and ongoing development;
- Adopting or adapting professional learning standards at the state level that guide training and skill-building opportunities; and
- Reallocating existing professional development funding that is ineffective and assessing resource needs to ensure adequate funding for high-quality, targeted training and skill-building services

focused on instruction and leadership skills.

A broad-based coalition could help a governor implement the policies and strategies described above by working to ensure policies are supported by legislation, adequately funded, and well implemented.

A few states are working to ensure that they have standards-related training and ongoing development opportunities that are specifically targeted toward principals. **Tennessee** Governor Bill Haslam unveiled a principal training endeavor at the annual Tennessee LEAD Conference.¹³ Governor Haslam is a proponent of developing school leaders and encouraged his state department of education to take necessary action to prepare principals for the changes required by the state’s adoption of the CCSS in 2010. In 2012, administrators were required to attend a CCSS workshop with their school teams; later, feedback revealed that principals wanted their own training before the team experience. Soon after, the state department of education launched Common Core Leadership Course 101, which served approximately 3,000 principals and assistant principals in spring and fall 2013.¹⁴ In addition to addressing the particular needs of principals, each day of the course included a “bridge to practice” problem that required principals to practice concepts with their teachers between sessions. For example, principals were asked to analyze curriculum guides to determine the percentage of time teachers were spending on certain concepts and standards. All training was delivered by leadership coaches who were selected through a competitive process. Common Core Leadership Course 101 was so popular that the state offered a

¹¹ Tabitha Grossman, *State Policies to Improve Teacher Professional Development* (Washington, DC: National Governors Association, 2009), <http://nga.org/files/live/sites/NGA/files/pdf/0910TEACHERDEVELOPMENT.PDF> (accessed April 14, 2015).

¹² Catherine Jacques, Matthew Clifford, and Katie Hornung, *State Policies on Principal Evaluation: Trends in a Changing Landscape* (Washington, DC: National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality, 2012), <http://www.gtlcenter.org/sites/default/files/docs/StatePoliciesOnPrincipalEval.pdf> (accessed April 14, 2015); and Education Counsel, *Teacher and Leader Evaluation State Legal Scan Working Draft (October 2012)* (Washington, DC, November 2012), <http://scee.groupsite.com/uploads/files/x/000/089/7eb/TLE%20State%20Law%20Scan.pdf?1352930911> (accessed April 14, 2015).

¹³ Tennessee Department of Education, LEAD Conference, <http://www.tn.gov/education/events/lead/index.shtml> (accessed April 29, 2015).

¹⁴ Tennessee Department of Education, *Common Core Leadership Course 101*, http://tncore.org/register_for_a_tncore_training/common_core_leadership_course_101.aspx (accessed April 29, 2015).

Common Core Leadership Course 202 in 2014 which served nearly 2,000 principals across the state and a Common Core Leadership Course 303 in 2015 which served 2,400 principals.¹⁵ Common Core Leadership Courses were funded primarily with Race to the Top funds and cost between \$750,000 and \$1.25 million for each one.¹⁶

Kentucky also has a training and ongoing development series for principals offered through the Kentucky Leadership Academy (KLA). KLA had existed for more than a decade when in 2010 the state tasked it with helping principals implement CCSS, which it adopted that year. In addition, with the help of foundation funding, a taskforce of members from the Kentucky education community worked with Learning Forward, a professional learning organization, to craft statewide professional learning policies.¹⁷ In June 2013, the state board of education adopted new regulations that require an administrator's professional learning to be related to his or her responsibilities.¹⁸ State policymakers and administrators in Kentucky believe that embracing professional learning standards and goals that are common across the state increases the likelihood that all Kentucky educators will be prepared for the changes associated with the CCSS and for revised teacher and principal evaluation systems that focus on growth and effectiveness.¹⁹

Short-Term Strategy 2: Develop Better Evaluations of Effectiveness

In-service training and ongoing development are only effective if they focus on needed information and skills. Opportunities for training and ongoing devel-

opment should therefore be linked with the results of evaluations so that educators are able to grow in particular areas of need.

The success of teacher evaluation processes depends in part on principals' expertise in evaluating and developing teachers, just as the success of the principal evaluation process requires supervisors to marshal similar expertise. Therefore, evaluations of principals must include an assessment of their ability to effectively evaluate teachers. Governors and other state policymakers can play a role in enacting and implementing a variety of policies that support the connection and alignment of the evaluation of principals to their ability to evaluate and develop teachers, particularly around standards implementation. Those strategies can build the capacity of principals to help teachers integrate higher standards into their classrooms. Similarly, supervisors of principals need training and tools to evaluate their principals on those concepts. States should consider the following tasks:

- Provide guidance and resources, such as direction and training concerning the subject matter necessary to meet state standards and to create alignment from grade to grade. That training can also support principals' understanding of what to look for when evaluating their teachers and how to provide teachers with targeted and constructive feedback around instruction;
- Help superintendents or principals' supervisors with the evaluation of principals by offering

¹⁵ Tennessee Department of Education, *Common Core Leadership Course 202*, http://tncore.org/register_for_a_tncore_training/common_core_leadership_course_202.aspx (accessed April 29, 2015); and Emily Barton, Tennessee Department of Education, Assistant Commissioner of Curriculum and Instruction, interview by author, August 6, 2013.

¹⁶ Emily Freitag, Tennessee Department of Education, Assistant Commissioner of Curriculum and Instruction, email communication, June 15, 2015.

¹⁷ Learning Forward, "Learning Forward Announces Kentucky Task Force Members as Part of the Organization's Common Core Initiative," April 3, 2012, <http://learningforward.org/blog-landing/press-releases/2012/04/03/learning-forward-announces-kentucky-task-force-members-as-part-of-the-organization's-common-core-initiative#.VUFI6fVkp> (accessed April 29, 2015).

¹⁸ Annual Professional Development Plan, Kentucky Board of Education, 704 KAR 3:035, <http://www.lrc.ky.gov/kar/704/003/035.htm> (accessed April 29, 2015).

¹⁹ Karen Kidwell, Kentucky Department of Education, Director of the Division of Program Standards, interview by author, July 30, 2013.

Coordinating Evaluation Systems with Related Changes in High-Stakes Accountability

As states consider changes to teacher and principal evaluation policies, they should be aware of the need to simultaneously coordinate two transitions: the conversion from existing state tests to tests aligned with more rigorous standards and the shift most states are making to new evaluation and accountability systems for teachers and principals, which include a student growth component often based on student assessment outcomes. States need to be thoughtful in the pacing of the implementation of those intersecting efforts to ensure that teachers have the training to teach the CCSS or alternative new and more rigorous standards well before being held accountable for their students' learning. If the high-stakes evaluation gets ahead of the training teachers and principals need to be successful, educators might undermine the new evaluation system, the standards, and the related assessments. Without assistance on the appropriate sequencing and pacing from states on those matters, principals will struggle to implement either new standards for college or career readiness or educator evaluation in their schools. Neither individual principals nor school districts have the capacity to do that work alone. For further discussion of the challenges and opportunities associated with those concurrent transitions, see the Aspen Institute and Council for Chief State School Officers publication, *Teaching to the Core: Integrating Implementation of Common Core and Teacher Effectiveness Policies*.²⁰

tools that measure the extent to which new reforms have been implemented in a school, the type and quality of professional development opportunities principals have provided to their staff, how much teachers' instruction has improved, and the ways in which principals have facilitated teacher leadership and team building;²¹ and,

- Invest in regional centers to provide timely, high-quality training and support to principals and principals' supervisors, thereby allowing states to

employ scalable and efficient strategies to ensure that all school and district leaders are trained on evaluation processes, strategies, and techniques.

In 2010, **Colorado** passed legislation requiring the yearly evaluation of principals, assistant principals, teachers, and specialized service professionals.²² To help implement the law, Governor John Hickenlooper allocated one-time discretionary funding over a three-year period to assist the state department of education in creating model detailed descriptions, tools, and specific evaluation requirements for teachers, principals, and

²⁰ Ross Wiener, *Teaching to the Core: Integrating Implementation of Common Core and Teacher Effectiveness Policies* (Washington, DC: Aspen Institute and Council for Chief State School Officers, 2013), <http://www.aspendrl.org/portal/browse/DocumentDetail?documentId=1640&download&admin=1640|1854119194> (accessed April 14, 2015).

²¹ Ibid.

²² Concerning Ensuring Quality Instruction Through Educator Effectiveness (EQUITEE), Senate Bill 10-191 (2010), <http://www.cde.state.co.us/sites/default/files/documents/cdedepcom/download/pdf/sb10-191.pdf> (accessed April 29, 2015).

specialized service professionals.²³ Specifically, he allocated in his FY 2012-2013 budget \$8.7 million to go to staff, training, state model development, and technology systems to support the evaluation process at the Colorado Department of Education (CDE).²⁴ The standards of performance outlined in the evaluation materials help guide the implementation of the Colorado Academic Standards (CAS). The incorporation of the CAS into teacher and principal evaluation observation rubrics, as opposed to the creation of separate CAS practice observation rubrics, demonstrates statewide coherence and integration of standards reform with educator evaluation reform. The state also requires any individual involved in evaluation to participate in a training program.²⁵ Between 2012 and 2013, the state offered 65 training sessions during which facilitators walked principals through the observation rubrics, discussed different professional practices, and conducted sessions for principals to engage with peers about what to look for when evaluating educators.²⁶ Between 2012 and 2014, the state trained over 15,000 educators, including principals. The cost of the trainings was covered through Race to the Top and other state funds.

Colorado is also working to ensure that principals are held accountable for their own knowledge and their school's implementation of CAS. A portion of each principal's performance evaluation hinges on whether he or she provided appropriately aligned training and ongoing development opportunities for his or her teachers.²⁷ In addition to those steps taken by Colorado, states should consider evaluating principals

based on their general ability to manage the transition to CCSS, or similar new state standards, set school-wide goals and measure students' learning in line with CCSS, and maintain a positive professional culture as both new evaluations and CCSS are rolled out.

Long-Term Strategy 1: Improve Principal Preparation Programs

To build a labor force of school leaders adept at instructional and human capital management, states should also consider policy solutions aimed at the longer term. For example, for new principals, much of the training around standards implementation and other education reforms should begin with their pre-service preparation programs. Program approval and accreditation are powerful levers that states can use to influence many aspects of preparation programs, including recruitment and selection of program candidates as well as structure and delivery of training and the content offered. Through their executive agencies, most governors oversee the approval of education preparation programs. In 39 states, the governor appoints the officials or board members who establish and enforce approval of regulations that can influence programs.²⁸ Raising admissions requirements and monitoring programs by holding them accountable to preparation program standards are two general ways for governors to improve principal preparation programs.

Teachers must have the knowledge and skills to effectively deliver the rigorous content that higher standards require, and principals must know how to

²³ Colorado Department of Education, *State Model Evaluation System for Teachers*, <http://www.cde.state.co.us/EducatorEffectiveness/SMES-Teacher.asp> (accessed April 29, 2015); and Colorado Department of Education, *State Model Evaluation System for Principals/Assistant Principals*, <http://www.cde.state.co.us/EducatorEffectiveness/SMES-Principal.asp> (accessed April 29, 2015).

²⁴ State of Colorado. (May 7, 2012). "Gov. Hickenlooper signs budget bill for next fiscal year," <http://www.colorado.gov/cs/Satellite/GovHickenlooper/CBON/1251622221066> (accessed May 20, 2015).

²⁵ Evaluator Training, [Colorado Revised Statute 22-9-108](http://www.cde.state.co.us/EducatorEffectiveness/SMES-Teacher.asp); and Local Boards of Education, [Colorado Revised Statute 22-9-106\(4\)\(a\)](http://www.cde.state.co.us/EducatorEffectiveness/SMES-Principal.asp). Districts are responsible for tracking and certifying that evaluators participate in appropriate training.

²⁶ Melissa Colsman, Colorado Department of Education, Executive Director of the Teaching and Learning Unit, interview by author, August 2, 2013; and Katy Anthes, Colorado Department of Education, Executive Director of Educator Effectiveness, interview by author, August 8, 2013.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ National Council on Teacher Quality, "Who's in Charge of Teacher Prep?" PDQ: Pretty Darn Quick Blog, entry posted March 14, 2013, <http://www.nctq.org/p/tqb/viewStory.jsp?id=33596> (accessed April 14, 2015).

serve as instructional leaders and support teachers through that transition. States can use program approval authority to ensure that clinical experiences and the curricula of educator preparation programs are aligned with state standards and appropriately training principals. In 2010, **Illinois** passed a law requiring principal preparation programs to meet new standards and curriculum requirements focused on instruction and student learning.²⁹ The law also mandates that all current principal preparation programs be reaccredited to ensure that they meet the new standards. States bore a small portion of the cost of the policy change. Preparation programs also incurred some costs to support faculty work on redesigning preparation programs. Before the principal preparation redesign work in Illinois, there were 31 approved programs enrolling more than 7,500 candidates for approximately 400-450 yearly principal vacancies, representing a substantial overproduction of administrative licenses for the state's available school leadership positions. As of 2015, there are 26 approved principal preparation programs with a current enrollment of 694 candidates.³⁰ These data reflect improved quality in overall principal preparation system operating in Illinois as well as better alignment between the numbers of principals being prepared with the number of available positions across the state. In addition, the data represent a cost-savings for districts—there are now fewer individuals graduating from preparation programs with master's degrees who automatically receive a salary increase, regardless of whether or not they take on leadership roles in the district.

Any state that has adopted new student standards and has a law requiring principals to be trained in those standards must reform their principal preparation program training curricula accordingly. In many cases, doing so will not necessitate a policy change

or additional ongoing costs, but governors might consider creating a task force that includes institutions of higher education to agree on goals, measures of progress, and a course of action to share expertise and expedite the progress. Governors can lead the way by communicating with principals, districts, the state education agency, and higher education institutions for those shifts to be made. Otherwise, preparation programs will continue to train principals on standards that are no longer current or relevant.

Long-Term Strategy 2: Shift Certification Policies

Certification and recertification are additional tools states can use to continuously ensure that principals have the ability to lead reform efforts and raise educational attainment. However, in many states, certification only requires acquisition of degree credentials, and recertification is often based on a simple number of professional development hours and a test of knowledge rather than a more thorough demonstration of expertise or competency.³¹ Until states fully integrate more rigorous standards into training, certification, and recertification procedures, those activities will not provide assurance that principals have the skills and knowledge to lead their schools. Governors have the opportunity to push for changes in their state credentialing systems to reflect, among other advancements, new, more rigorous standards.

Connecticut began to revise its leadership standards in early 2010.³² The state's leadership standards were adapted from the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) Standards and are aligned with currently used teacher and student learning standards, including CCSS. For example, *Performance Expectation 2* of the leadership standards calls for leaders to understand, help implement, and

²⁹ Sara Shelton, *Preparing a Pipeline of Effective Principals: A Legislative Approach* (Washington, DC: National Conference of State Legislatures, 2012), <http://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/school-leadership/state-policy/Documents/Preparing-a-Pipeline-of-Effective-Principals-A-Legislative-Approach.pdf> (accessed April 14, 2015).

³⁰ T. Erika Hunt, Senior Policy Analyst and Researcher, Center for the Study of Education Policy, Illinois State University, email communication, May 15, 2015.

³¹ T. Grossman, *State Policies*.

³² Connecticut State Department of Education, *Common Core of Leading: Connecticut School Leadership Standards*, (June 2012), <http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/pdf/educatorstandards/ccl-csls.pdf> (accessed April 29, 2015).

evaluate a standards-based curriculum as well as use assessments of student learning to monitor and evaluate progress. All prospective administrators must pass a performance-based assessment for initial administrator certification. To effectively demonstrate evidence of meeting performance expectations, principals must have a sound understanding of the new state learning standards. The state continues to revise the certification assessment to reflect the changes being made in schools based on the Connecticut School Leadership Standards and in alignment with Connecticut's Common Core of Teaching and the Common Core State Standards.³³

Assisting Principals through Indirect Policy Support

In addition to the policies outlined above, governors can assist principals in their work to improve educational attainment through indirect policy support. With regard to the implementation of higher standards, governors can create the conditions for principals to access high-quality, aligned materials and provide opportunities for teachers to take on supplementary responsibilities and leadership roles that better distribute tasks related to standards implementation. Much of the work to bring broad education reforms to fruition will happen at the school, district, or state education agency level, but the governor can play an important role by voicing support for necessary actions and allocating or reallocating resources accordingly. When a governor sends a message that a particular change is important and clearly articulates the rationale, he or she creates a foundation on which the rest of the leaders and the state can build their cases to support the reform.

The high standards that most states are currently working to implement, whether CCSS or other

standards that better prepare students for college or a career, do not have a prescribed curriculum or aligned materials. The creation of those resources—which is left to districts and schools—is difficult and time consuming but extremely important for the successful implementation of the standards. Principals can support effective school-wide implementation of those standards by ensuring that curricular modules, accompanying materials, and culturally and contextually appropriate reading lists are available, aligned, and of high quality. Unfortunately, principals often do not have enough time, expertise, or guidance to inspect existing resources or develop their own.³⁴ Governors can push to make resources—time, money, tools, and capacity—available to assist principals in that work. Some states will be able to support principals directly by creating networks of principals and teachers to work together to develop a shared library of lesson plans, communication tools, and other resources to assist the implementation of new standards. Other states will leave those tasks to the districts. In those states, state-level policymakers can create conditions under which districts are able to support principals by creating guidance, allocating funding for the development and implementation of resources, and removing any hindering policies. For example, **New York** used \$34 million in Race to the Top funding to create free, optional curricula aligned with the CCSS in English language arts and mathematics for optional use across the state as part of the New York State Board of Regents Reform Agenda.³⁵ Principals and districts can choose to adopt or adapt the resource to fit the needs of their particular student populations. The lesson plans include supporting materials and samples of student work for principals to review with their teachers and are designed to support attainment of CCSS, which the

³³ Larry Jacobson, Connecticut State Department of Education, Education Consultant, Bureau of Educator Standards and Certification, interview by author, October 15, 2013.

³⁴ Nancy Kober and Diane Stark Rentner, *Common Core State Standards: Progress and Challenges in School Districts' Implementation* (Washington, DC: Center on Education Policy, 2011), <http://www.cep-dc.org/displayDocument.cfm?DocumentID=374> (accessed April 14, 2015); and Joellen Killion, *Meet the Promise of Content Standards: The Principal* (Oxford, OH: Learning Forward, 2012), <http://learningforward.org/docs/commoncore/meetpromiseprincipal.pdf> (accessed April 14, 2015).

³⁵ Common Core Curriculum, EngageNY Website, <https://www.engageny.org/common-core-curriculum> (accessed April 29, 2015); and Tom Dunn, Director of Communications at New York State Education Department, email communication, June 2015.

state adopted in 2010.³⁶ The resources can be found on the state's EngageNY website which, as of April 2015, has had more than 20 million downloads of the math and ELA modules from across the country.³⁷

Effective school leadership is a shared experience, especially during times of transition, such as implementation of new state standards and heightened expectations for student achievement. States can foster systemic collaboration that improves instruction when teacher leaders take on new, supportive positions, such as instructional coaches and mentors who analyze data and fine tune lesson plans. Teachers can serve in those supportive positions part-time while continuing to teach in their own classrooms, serve as full-time teacher leaders, or remain in their classrooms full-time as models of exemplary teaching practices for new

and developing teachers. For those new positions to excel, governors can work with legislators to establish a policy initiative that taps into the expertise of the state's top teachers to better support the work all teachers are expected to do to help students meet more rigorous state standards.

In 2013, **Iowa** passed legislation establishing an extensive statewide teacher leadership system.³⁸ The Teacher Leadership and Compensation System is being phased in over three years, for a total cost of \$150 million annually when fully in place in 2016-2017. Thirty-nine school districts, which represent about one-third of the state's student enrollment, launched the program in 2014-15. Another 76 districts, representing another third of the state's student enrollment, will participate in 2015-16. Remaining districts have the

Using Principal Voices

States would be remiss to leave principals out of the policy-development process. Their expertise should be invited to inform discussions about policies that will affect their work and schools. In **Colorado**, a principal serves on the governor-appointed 15-member State Council for Educator Effectiveness. The council is responsible for providing guidance on several elements of teacher and principal effectiveness as well as recommending state policy changes to the preparation, evaluation, and support of educators. **Tennessee** also seeks advice from principals through their statewide Principal Study Council. The council is open to every public school principal and assistant principal in the state. Collectively, they communicate with the state board of education and state department of education about suggestions for improving education. The opportunity is also designed to develop principals' leadership skills. Tapping into the expertise of principals can help states create the best policies to successfully bring more rigorous educational standards to every classroom and student. **Illinois** includes principals on its Performance Evaluation Advisory Council, which advises the Illinois State Board of Education on educator effectiveness issues and recommends policy.

³⁶ Amy McIntosh, formerly of the New York State Education Department, Senior Fellow at Regents' Research Fund, interview by author, August 5, 2013.

³⁷ Elizabeth Haydel and Sheila Byrd Carmichael, *Uncommonly Engaging: A Review of the EngageNY English Language Arts Common Core Curriculum* (Thomas B. Fordham Institute, May 2015), <http://edex.s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/publication/pdfs/TBFI-EngageNY-Final.pdf> (accessed June 15, 2015).

³⁸ House File 215, Iowa Legislature, May 2013, <http://coolice.legis.iowa.gov/Cool-ICE/default.asp?Category=billinfo&Service=Billbook&menu=false&hbill=HF215&ga=85> (accessed April 29, 2015).

option to join in 2016-17. A state budget appropriation provides grant funding to districts in the first year of participation. After that, funding rolls into the state's school aid formula, creating sustainable financial support for the Teacher Leadership and Compensation System.³⁹ Districts have three options when developing their plans, all of which call for various leadership roles and pathways for teachers to advance toward more highly paid positions with additional responsibilities. The state also provides funding to the Iowa Department of Education and regional education agencies to assist school districts in those endeavors.⁴⁰ Iowa's legislation creates a transformational support structure for principals, teacher leaders and teachers to work together to implement higher academic standards and raise student achievement statewide.

Conclusion

Principals are vital to the successful implementation of educational reform efforts, including higher state standards. Their implementation efforts can drive

ground-level reform and serve to multiply the influence of effective teachers school wide and statewide. Governors and other state leaders can bolster the efforts of principals by facilitating and supporting policy development and implementation that reinforces those goals. Considering short-term strategies—such as providing tailored professional development to principals and implementing teacher and principal evaluation systems—will help current principals successfully implement state educational reforms in their schools. Implementing long-term changes—including embedding knowledge of higher standards into the preparation and certification of principals—can create a workforce of principals that is able to bring about broad change. A key element of the governor's role in leading policy change is continuous, targeted communications about the value of reforms, including higher standards, and the changes that are needed, presented in the form of a clear, statewide vision. That lays the groundwork for principals to succeed and, in turn, for teachers and students to flourish.

Cortney Rowland
Senior Policy Analyst
Education Division
NGA Center for Best Practices
202-624-7857

June 2015

Recommended citation format: C.Rowland. *Improving Educational Outcomes: How State Policy Can Support School Principals as Instructional Leaders* (Washington, D.C.: National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, June 25, 2015).

³⁹ Legislative Services Agency, Iowa Legislature. (February 23, 2015). Fiscal Note, <https://www.legis.iowa.gov/docs/publications/FN/644066.pdf> (accessed May 20, 2015).

⁴⁰ Iowa Department of Education, "2013 Legislative Session—Statute Changes Affecting Schools," Iowa Department of Education, <https://www.educateiowa.gov/sites/files/ed/documents/2013-07-08LetterToTheField-StatuteChangesAffectingSchools.pdf> (accessed April 29, 2015).